THOUGHTS

ON THE

CONDUCT

AND

CONTINUATION

OF THE

Volunteers of Ireland.

1783

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THOUGHTS, &c.

THAT the Volunteers of *Ireland* have preſerved and vindicated the rights of their country, is generally admitted: Whether their continuation be neceſſary to her happineſs, is a queſtion which admits of ſome difference of opinion. That after war, and grievances, and elections ſhall be over, they will decline and diſſolve, is predicted by many, with affected ſorrow, and ſecret ſatisfaction. I read with pleaſure, ſpirited determinations to preſerve the inſtitution; determinations dictated by patriotiſm, but connected with no plan, and in general, followed by reſolutions virtuous in themſelves, but probably injurious to the cauſe. It

is a delicate and a thankleſs office to attack the favourite prejudices of my countrymen: But it is better to be guilty of an unpopular forwardneſs, than of a cold indifference to the public intereſt. We have obtained a free conſtitution, as free as England acquired at the Revolution; but the advantages of that freedom will depend on the uſe we make of it, and on the conduct we ſhall adopt, after being put into poſſeſſion:—England, ſince the Revolution, has had her grievances.

The continuation and the conduct of the Volunteers will be a principal ſpring of our own actions, and will materially affect the demeanour of our governors. No time can be ſo quiet, no government ſo ſtrong, no conſtitution ſo ſettled, as to leave the conduct of an armed people to be a matter of indifference. I find, that two opinions are propagated on this ſubject: the one makes its way in private, and far more rapidly than is generally known or confeſſed. The other, is avowed in our newſpapers, and may be found in the reſolutions of many very reſpectable Delegates.—My wiſh is to mediate between them: my conviction is, that each of them goes too far.

On the other hand, I hear it argued, that the Volunteers have effected their purpoſes, and are no longer neceſſary: That it is abſurd to infer their future, from their paſt diſcretion: That men who have a great object before them, may act with conſiſtency under its deep impreſſion; but when that impreſſion ſhall be removed,

moved, they will fall into all the extravagancies to which men are liable; intoxicated with power, and accuſtomed to controul the law and the parliament. That, already a part of their diſcretion has vaniſhed: That the ſuperintending power of an armed and unbridled Democracy, is incompatible with law, commerce, or tranquillity. Theſe opinions are not the leſs injurious, becauſe they have not been ſupported in public. If men are afraid to ſpeak their minds, it is a new proof that their minds are deeply affected.

On the other hand, it is not argued, but ſeems to be taken for granted, not only that the Volunteers ſhould continue, but that an unexampled change of circumſtances ſhould produce no alteration of conduct: If Delegates aſſemble, we are not very certain to hear of any digeſted plan, by which the Volunteers are to be preſerved and regulated; but we are ſure to hear of reſolutions, calculated poſſibly to improve, but certainly to alter the conſtitution:— Proteſtant and Cathlic, conſtituent and not conſtituent unite to give inſtructions to members of parliament. We cannot foretell where the ſtorm is to fall, but we may eaſily predict that ſome of the powers of the conſtitution are to be ſhaken. Within what bounds this armed interpoſition is to be confined, or whether it is to be confined to any, ſeems never once to be brought into debate. An authority, to which, in the whole range of hiſtory, there is nothing ſimilar is ſeen to operate daily in a peaceful ſtate, and one not diſguſted with its eſtabliſhed conſtitution: All

this paſſes on, as if it were the ſimpleſt thing in the world. After a ſhort familiarity, it ſeems to make as little impreſſion as the Alps make on the mind of a Savoyard: the error, if it be one, is not remarked by thoſe who fall into it, nor is it publicly noticed by another party, who think it to be already paſt a remedy, and who look forward to the decline of the Volunteers, as the only thing which can put an end to their ſuppoſed extravagance. To me, the mode of thinking, adopted by the latter, appears about as reaſonable as the conduct of the planters to their negroes in *Candide*.—If a foot is hurt, cut off the leg; if a finger is ſore, cut off an arm: but if I think theſe opinions to be erroneous, I do not think them to be inſignificant. The continuation of the Volunteers depends principally upon their popularity, and in a great meaſure on the ſupport of the very men I ſpeak of. I wiſh to ſet the nation a-thinking on the ſubject; for a nation to think upon a ſubject much, is for them to think well. The conduct of the Volunteers ought to be the reſult of thought and ſyſtem, not of momentary and irregular impulſe: The nature and uſe of Volunteering ought to be fully ſtated, the advantages which have been, and which are produced by it, ought to be impreſſed upon the public mind; not inconſiderately overlooked, or languidly admitted.

In the hiſtory of mankind, we read of few revolutions which have been favourable to liberty, ſtill fewer that have been effected without bloodſhed, the ambition of an aſpiring prince,

prince, or the aid of religious fury. We ſee in Ireland, a nation deliberately breaking her chains; chains not forged by the ambition of a prince, and brittle by the imbecility of his ſucceſſor, but rivetted by a ſuperior nation, perhaps the moſt powerful and the moſt tenacious in the modern world; a nation whoſe power was at our door, whoſe fleets encircled our coaſt, whoſe armies were in our boſom, whoſe partiſans were in our ſenate; yet in theſe circumſtances we have ſeen a revolution not only favourable to liberty, but leaving it perfect; not only effected without blood, but ended in an augmented friendſhip, each nation appearing more reſpectable to each other, and to itſelf.

The contemptuous pride of the aggreſſor, the rankling animoſity of the injured, the ſeverity of the Preſbyterian, the quietiſm of the Catholic, the meanneſs of a corrupted ſenate, the turbulence of an armed democracy, have left Friendſhip, Union, Liberty, and Peace behind them; a commerce free as the winds, protected by fleets, fructified by ſettlements, domeſtic harmony, political freedom, and that elevation of ſentiment which is the fruit, and the protection of them all.

It is an event, on which the mind of the hiſtorian, wearied with the crimes and follies of mankind, will reſt with pleaſure. The mixed and common motives which cauſe revolutions, and marr the ſettlement which follows them, will have no page in the recital: All was judi-

cious,

cious, all was fortunate: It began; it proceeded; it ſtopped where it ought.

Let us look back to what was the ſituation of Ireland. I ſhall chuſe the period of Lord Harcourt's adminiſtration as my æra, becauſe at that time every thing ſeemed to be decided againſt us; our revenues had fallen ſhort of our expenditure, in the ſum of 130,000*l.* a year, though the fleets of France had not then interrupted our commerce. The pittance of permitted liberty which we were allowed to play with, ſeemed to be involved in the ſucceſs of a war, which was to eſtabliſh the power of the Britiſh parliament over *all the dominions of the crown* *. The national virtue was ſo depreſſed, that we contributed to the armaments by which our own conſtitution was to be deſtroyed. An embargo, perhaps an illegal embargo, compleated the catalogue of commercial grievances; the purpoſes for which it was impoſed, finiſhed the picture of nation humiliation. Our commerce, and our conſtitution, lived, as it were, from hand to mouth; the former might hope ſome relief from compaſſion, the latter might exiſt by the defeat of our own forces. New taxes, and a reduction of expence, might, as it was hoped, protract our ruin; the taxes failed (though perhaps not ill deviſed) from the want of reſources. The promiſed reduction would have been an incon-

* Speech from the throne to the Britiſh parliament.

venient

venient meaſure to government, and more hazardous than the breach of a miniſterial engagement. The views of adminiſtration were too decidedly oppoſed to the public intereſt, to ſuffer a reduction of the moſt uſeleſs offices, and the ſpirit of the nation was not too high to ſuffer their being purchaſed by penſions, from their proprietors, and transferred to others. But why ſhould I enter into a minute detail of miniſterial extravagance? ſuffice it to ſay, that their wild profuſion, their intricate barter, the encreaſe of expence, and the failure of revenue, were ſeen, debated, and ſubmitted to. The ſymptoms of national ruin, like that fixed and contracted countenance which is the fore-runner of death, ſettled on the face of our national accounts. The introduction of foreign mercenaries, paid by another country, that laſt proof and aſſurance of provincial ſubjection, was offered to the Kingdom of Ireland, not as an inſult, but as a boon. When our poſterity ſhall read that this offer was rejected, they will, perhaps, miſtake the motives by which men were actuated, and will hail that rejection as the dawning of a national ſpirit; they will ſuſpect a deep deſign in government, and reſpect the penetration which reſiſted it. But it is a fact, and a curious one, that the propoſal flowed from the decency of adminiſtration, and that the rejection was obtained by its cunning.

Such was the ſtate of Ireland, ſuch were the habits of the Iriſh mind, when the danger of a foreign invaſion rouſed the nation from her ſlumbers, and produced the Volunteers; and the

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over-rated ſervility of our diſpoſition, aided by imminent danger, and a poverty which precluded any other mode of defence, induced a weak adminiſtration to grant them arms. The nation was fortunate in the perfection of her calamities: had the danger been leſs urgent, had the finances been leſs embarraſſed, had the ſpirit appeared leſs paſſive, perhaps we ſhould not have had the means of redreſs; and if the meaſure of our grievances had been leſs full, perhaps we ſhould not have uſed them. A vigorous and deciſive exertion of ſtrength was neceſſary; without it the Engliſh miniſtry dared not to give us commerce or liberty, if they wiſhed it; not only the meaſures which flowed from the temper of the miniſtry, but the whole ſyſtem was ruinous; the nation was ſinking under a heavier weight than the weight of the ſceptre. Ye who forget this depreſſion of your native country, ye whoſe cold and conceited penetration has diſcovered every little error of the Volunteers of Ireland, and who are now as ready to call them dangerous, as ye once were to pronounce them ineffectual; reflect for a moment what we are, and what we were, and tell us what we ſhould have been, if the Volunteers had not exiſted; learn to reſpect and love an inſtitution which, with all the defects of its members, has preſerved your country, and conſider, that an inſtitution which required perfection in all who compoſe it, would itſelf be radically defective. But to men of this deſcription alone, I do not addreſs myſelf; a ſtanding army, large in proportion to our revenue, but utterly inadequate to our defence, and an eſtabliſhment of heavy cavalry, will to them appear abſolutely indiſpenſable;

ſable; when they ſpeak on theſe ſubjects, they will tell us, that in peace we ſhould be prepared for war. But an armed people which coſts nothing to the treaſury, whoſe force laughs at invaſion, and who can neither be ſecretly pilfered from us, nor given away in a moment of fond intoxication, will probably ſeem extremely ſuperfluous.

I do not contend for an armed democracy that is to interfere in every meaſure of government; I do not ſay that the authority of parliament ought to be ſuperſeded; I am ſenſible that the armed man owes a peculiar duty to that perſonage who, by the conſtitution, holds the power of the ſword; I defend the inſtitution in that high ſimplicity which is its original character, not in the complicated perverſions which are the ſeeds of its decline; I love it too well, to look upon them with indifference.

It will be admitted, that no country can be ſafe without ſome expence to the ſtate; without ſome taxation, either forced or voluntary. It remains for us to diſcover what mode of defence is the moſt cheap, and the moſt effectual. To talk of a ſure and perfect defence for Ireland, except that which we poſſeſs, is to talk of national bankruptcy: Were we to debar ourſelves from every act of liberality to a ſiſter and a ſinking country, were we to adopt a militia as large as we could afford to pay, the land would be imperfectly defended. If defence were our only object, we could not purchaſe

a protection equal in force to the Volunteers, for four hundred thouſand pounds a year: If the advantages of volunteering went no farther, have I not already ſaid enough?

The national ſafety is ſo great an object, that liberty itſelf has been too often poſtponed to it; but to enſure liberty by the ſame preparations which are to repel invaſion, is what England has attempted but feebly, what ſcarce any other modern country has attempted at all, and what no ancient nation appears to me to have reconciled to a ſtate of commerce; there have been nations who have done it, and in proportion to their ſtrength, more effectually than we have; but they were not commercial nations. It has often been aſſerted, that volunteering detracts ſo much from induſtry, that it is unfit for a commercial country. Are not commercial countries to be defended? Are they to offer nothing to an invader except temptation? Theſe reaſoners ſeem to be a little forgetful in their calculations; they count the idle days which are ſpent in volunteering, but they forget that by embodying five thouſand ſoldiers, we take more days from induſtry than what are waſted by all the volunteers of Ireland. Change a manufacturer into a ſoldier, and you loſe two hundred days in the year to the manufacture he was employed in; enliſt him in the Volunteers, and he will loſe ten working days in the year. One ſoldier enliſted detracts as much from induſtry as twenty Volunteers, ſuppoſing all the Volunteers to be men employed in induſtry

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—the ſoldier is to be maintained by taxes; I think it will hardly be denied me, that taxation is a burthen to commerce. Volunteering is the propereſt defence for a commercial country, becauſe it takes leſs from induſtry, and is more œconomical than any thing which can be ſubſtituted in its place.

A people, who have not a power of ultimate reſiſtance to their oppreſſors, may, by accident, and for a time, be happy. By the moderation of thoſe who govern them, they may have a uſufruct of liberty; but it is an abuſe of terms to call them—a free people.—It may be neceſſary to public quiet, that this power ſhould have a limitation. It ſhould begin where the conſtitution ends, but ſhould not be a part of it. It ſhould be reſtrained by a ſenſe of the calamities attendant upon the uſe of it. Torpid amidſt the heats of ordinary queſtions, nothing but the conflagration of the public mind ſhould warm it into life.

The Britiſh nation long poſſeſſed this power to a degree which would alarm our modern quietiſt. The people were enjoined by law to have arms in their houſes, and to be converſant in their uſe. The monarch had no ſtanding army to counterbalance them. Yet the houſe of Tudor were not too much controuled. Let there not be factious and powerful barons, and even an armed people will not be addicted to inſurrections. It is an idle apprehenſion to think they will. —It is not hiſtory, it is not human nature. The

King of Ireland would be ſafe in his legal authority, with leſs military force than what is domeſtic to Ireland. But when we reflect on the fleets, the armies, the valour, and the wealth of Great Britain, all in addition to a power, which would in itſelf be ſufficient, when we conſider that an iſland, without a navy, can do nothing, even in its rage, but tear its own bowels, we muſt perceive that our power of reſiſtance is of any thing rather too extenſive. Under an injury which would unite and inflame every deſcription of Iriſhmen; under a breach of faith which would cut up all negotiation with our ſiſter country by the roots, we may form an alliance with a nation of ſlaves, and may become a ſeparate and a miſerable nation. But there is a miſery beyond this miſery—The miſery of being ſlaves.—The ſlaves not of a king, but of a nation. Is there an Iriſhman who would wiſh his country to be deprived of an alternative? Is there an honeſt Engliſhman who thinks ſuch an alternative may not be ſafely entruſted to a ſiſter nation, connected with Great Britain by a thouſand ties, admitted to her ſettlements, and ſatisfied with her conceſſions. Reſiſtance is in Ireland as it ought to be every where—a poſſible, but a tremendous alternative. It was lately the ſpirit, and the policy of the times to ſpeak of the Volunteers of Ireland in terms of menace and of exaggeration. The hour of threatening is paſt, and it is now for the intereſt of both countries to ſpeak of them as they are. Men, ready to endure the laſt extremities rather than ſubmit to

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a foreign yoke, but loyal even to enthuſiaſm; an armed body compoſed of men of every deſcription; not an armed democracy; admirably capable to aſſiſt a royal army, but in no ſtate of preparation to reſiſt one. They have preſerved a ſiſter country to Great Britain, not only unaſſailed, but unalarmed by all her enemies. In the midſt of a war with half the ſtrength of Europe; at a time when the Britiſh navy was inferior to that of her enemies, they have enabled the Iriſh Parliament to ſpare Five Thouſand men from the Iriſh eſtabliſhment. The Britiſh army, the Britiſh ſeamen have not, during the ſame period, been ſo free from acts of violence. If in ſome reſolutions they ſpoke with warmth, they waited the anſwer with temper. It was on an occaſion which juſtified their warmth, and on an occaſion which ought never to recur. Will any friend of the Britiſh ſtrength, or of the Iriſh ſafety, form a wiſh that they ſhould diſſolve? We ſhall continue to pay an army, a part of which we ſhall conſider as a gift to the Britiſh grandeur. Why not? That grandeur we participate. But let us remember that before Volunteering, that army was inſufficient for our own ſecurity; and that after it, we could give Great Britain by a vote, as much as ſhe loſt by a capitulation.

There does not exiſt a more idle apprehenſion, than that the Volunteers of Ireland are dangerous to the unity of the empire. If a ridiculous jealouſy on the ſubject did not viſibly gain ground, it would not be worth a refutation.

tation. I will not diſſemble my opinion, that if ever a ſpirit of faction ſhould ſeize them, if they ſhould reſtleſsly interfere with the conſtitution, if they ſhould captiouſly expel every one whoſe moderation tempers the general enthuſiaſm, and if from being captious they ſhould become licentious, they may be inconvenient enough in ſome diſtricts of the iſland. But the evil will bring its remedy along with it. The laws are ſtrong, the government can do its duty. There is both ſenſe and power enough in the nation to correct them. And ſhould they prove incorrigible, the inſtitution has this fortunate peculiarity—that when it ſhall degenerate, it will periſh. Kings may hold their thrones after they become tyrants; Parliaments may continue after they become corrupt; armies may be encreaſed by their crimes; but Volunteers can exiſt but by adhering to their true duties. The ſenſe of their utility is their only laſting ſupport. Their reputation is their vital principle. They will encreaſe when they ought to encreaſe; they will diminiſh when they ought to diminiſh. They will periſh if they ought to periſh——May they continue as long as they ought to continue!

Can any propoſition be more obvious, than that every nation ought to poſſeſs the greateſt faculty of ſelf-defence that is conſiſtent with induſtry, comfort, œconomy, and tranquility. Volunteering is the moſt ſimple and obvious idea in the world, and yet nothing is more uncommon. It is uncommon, becauſe the

the views of the governors are almoſt every where oppoſed to the intereſts of the governed. Every king would wiſh his country to be ſafe, and his revenues to be ſpared, were not his own tyranny to be at the ſame time endangered. I was ſurpriſed, ſome time ago, at reading an account of Volunteers armed by government, cloathing themſelves, electing their own officers, and making their own regulations. There are ſuch, and in the very boſom of arbitrary power—in the town of Guiaquil, in Spaniſh America. Why do we find them there? Becauſe it is obvious to common ſenſe, that they are the cheapeſt and the moſt effectual defenders; and becauſe their intereſts are not there oppoſed to that of their governors. An armed nation is likely to be a free one; but an armed city is too weak to aſſert itſelf. Encircled by nations whom they have enſlaved, the Spaniſh inhabitants of South America are more than the friends of the Spaniſh government.—They are its accomplices.

In ſmall ſtates, the principal object of the government is, ſecurity from an invaſion, at an expence which the ſtate can bear. It has therefore been the wiſh of the rulers, to arm the people—of courſe, ſmall ſtates have been the moſt free. And this has been the caſe ſo generally, that it has been made a queſtion, Whether for the good of mankind there ought to be any great ones? In large ſtates, this firſt object, ſecurity, is accompliſhed with leſs exertion; and their governors have had leiſure to attend

attend to their next great object—to oppreſs the people with eaſe to themſelves. They have therefore wiſhed to diſarm the people, and to defend them by a mercenary force. So ſeldom are mankind governed as they ought to be, that if we are to ſearch for voluntary defenders of their country through the modern world, we ſhall find little to reward our pains. The unpaid militia of Lacedemon had ſome circumſtances of ſimilitude to the Volunteers of Ireland. They reſembled them in the œconomy of their inſtitution; they ſurpaſſed them in the univerſality of it, perhaps too, in their diſcipline. But in Sparta, the happineſs, and even the freedom of the individual was ſacrificed to the independence of the ſtate. Poſſeſſed of the capacity of defence, beyond what is poſſible in a commercial country, they had little that was valuable to defend. To take as much of an antient eſtabliſhment as can be adapted to a modern ſituation; to adopt the wiſdom of a ſmall ſtate as far as it ſuits a great one; to borrow from a martial policy as much as is conſiſtent with a commercial one, is the peculiar honour of Ireland. One advantage, indeed, was poſſeſſed by the Spartans, which we cannot hope for. The diſcipline of the people was the principal object of the government. We cannot boaſt ſo firm a foundation. A little languor, or a few indiſcretions may deſtroy the whole of a fabrick which is not built upon the laws, but on the temper of individuals. Without ſyſtematical care, it may crumble away imperceptibly; or, perhaps, it may be

be thrown down at once, and a militia be built upon its ruins.

The Engliſh Militia, the child of Lord Chatham, but educated by his ſucceſſors, affords us matter for cenſure, and for commendation. With all its regulations, it is a force almoſt conſtitutional; from its numbers, it is no contemptible ſafeguard, though it has not been felt to be a ſufficient one; and by the change of the men, it ſomewhat diſſeminates the uſe of arms, notwithſtanding that groſs perverſion—the uſe of ſubſtitutes. Aſſiſted by the ſenſe of national danger, and by the faſhion of the times, it comprehended amongſt its officers many of the beſt men in England; and, during the late war, it might be eſteemed a ſufficient ſecurity againſt any groſs violation of the conſtitution. It will always be decent, but it may not always be neceſſary to entruſt the command of the militia to popular characters. Whatever is ſlaviſh in the Engliſh militia, is written in the law; of what is the contrary, much has been owing to temporary circumſtances, or to the mildneſs, or the management of adminiſtration. It may at any time be garbled by a miniſter; it may degenerate of itſelf, by the indolence of the country gentlemen. It is expenſive to the ſtate; it is burthenſome to the yeoman; in uniting the freeman and the ſoldier, it detracts not a little from each: it is faulty both with reſpect to thoſe whom it comprehends, and thoſe who eſcape it. It ſubjects the free-born Briton who is enrolled, to the ig-

nominies of military puniſhment; and it lulls the reſt of the nation into an inglorious exemption from the defence of their country. The thouſands who are embodied, are, for a time, totally loſt to induſtry, and, perhaps, diſinclined to it for ever; and it cannot be ſaid to form a warlike people, or a national defence, adequate to the courage or the population of England. When in the year 1779, the French threatened a deſcent at Plymouth, the nation turned pale behind the ſhield of its militia. Where then was the Saxon ſtrength? Where was the armed people? There were more than thirty thouſand men within a day's march of that repoſitory of the Britiſh greatneſs; men of more daring minds, and of ſtronger bodies than their expected invaders. Except a few, they would have leaned their brawny arms upon their ſpades, the liſtleſs ſpectators of their country's humiliation; or they would have exhibited an awkward courage, with arms in their hands, as uſeleſs as their pitchforks. An invader of Cork or of Derry, would have found ſome difference in the prize, and in the defenders of it.

Such a militia as this, or as much of ſuch a militia as we can afford, is the beſt compromiſe we can hope for on the decline of the Volunteers. And it is a compromiſe which many wiſe men will wiſh for, if the Volunteers ſhall depart from their true principles. Whatever the militia man may gain as a ſoldier, undoubtedly he loſes ſomewhat as a citizen. The Volunteer is improved in both capacities.

Military

Military diſcipline, which in other inſtitutions, teaches a ſlaviſh ſubordination, has given to us a new leſſon of equality. The ariſtocracy is taught, even by its own vanity, to court the democracy. The intercourſe between the officer and the private Volunteer ſoftens the ſentiments of the one, and elevates thoſe of the other. What a difference was there between the Engliſh yeoman and the Iriſh tenant! We hoped that commerce and property might elevate the minds of our poorer countrymen in the courſe of time, perhaps in half a century. How much has Volunteering done in two years? The pooreſt Volunteer feels himſelf a member of a free, and of a ſtrong ſtate; his ideas expand, his character is ennobled. He begins to love and to enforce the laws. He is no longer a timid ſlave, who conceals his ſubſtance, but a free ſubject, proud that he can afford an uniform.

The ariſtocracy is ſtill more benefitted, becauſe it is more intereſted in the good of the ſtate. They thought they were members of a free country, becauſe they could ride in their coaches, drive for their rents, and horſe-whip their tenants. They were not members of a free country; they were a part of the chain which bound their country. They are become ſenſible of what one man owes to another. They feel that national dignity is a better thing than the power of inſulting a dependent. That a whole nation muſt partake of liberty, or the nation will not unite to preſerve it.

Having corrected the ariſtocratical ſpirit, that ancient and domeſtic enemy of our national character, Volunteering goes on to other improvements. The Proteſtant, no longer the partiſan of a power which ſupported him againſt the majority of his fellow ſubjects, has dared to admit his Catholic brother to the rights of a citizen. To Volunteering we owe this acceſſion of ſtrength and dignity. The Proteſtant would not have ventured to claſp the Catholic but to an armed boſom. But it does not ſtop even here. Having united the two religions by the bonds of common intereſt, it proceeds to bind them ſtill cloſer, by the ſofter ties of ſocial intercourſe. The Papiſt, with an orange cockade, fires in honour of King William's birth-day. He goes to a Proteſtant church, and hears a charity ſermon. He dines with his Proteſtant aſſociates, and perhaps a Popiſh chaplain ſays grace. They are ſlight men, who think theſe to be ſlight things. We have lamented that two thirds of our countrymen were precluded from the defence of their country. We have thought of remedies for this evil, but no man could frame a law that he himſelf could perfectly approve. To permit the uſe of arms to all the Catholics would have been madneſs. To confine it to men of a certain property, was a project full of difficulty and of offence. To go too low would have been dangerous; to reſtrain it too much would have been unwiſe. Men of the faireſt characters would have been excluded, and the nation would have been but half defended. We wiſhed for ſome mode of judging,

ing, which applied not to property only, but to fitneſs and to character, by which a worthy Roman Catholic might, and ſuch a one only, be truſted with the uſe of arms, and attached to his Proteſtant fellow-ſubjects. Volunteering has done what law could not do. The Catholic who wiſhes to carry arms, propoſes himſelf to a Proteſtant corps. His character is tried by his neighbours; he is admitted to an honour and a privilege; he receives a reward for his good conduct, a reward by which the giver is benefitted, and which the receiver holds no longer than he deſerves it. The trial by the vicinage is the boaſt of modern policy; the cenſorial power was the ſupport of ancient virtue—the Catholic Volunteer holds the privilege of arms under a fortunate union of them both—under a cenſorial power, exerciſed by the vicinage.

Thus are the beſt of the Catholic body happily ſelected; the whole of the Catholic body ſatisfied, and the two religions marvellouſly united, form a ſtrength the moſt cheaply maintained, the moſt effectual, and the moſt favourable to liberty, that ever appeared in a commercial country. A power that may ſilently preſide over the national welfare; and that is acting with effect, when it ſeems to be but an indolent ſpectator. An armed body, that is a good looker on, though it would be a rough director of the meaſures of ſtate. Government feels their impreſſion, even when it does not hear their clamours. The corps had not begun

gun to publiſh reſolutions, when the free trade was obtained by their mute efficacy. The effect of ſuch impreſſions is perceptible to every one, not in proportion to his ingenuity but to his real ſagacity. But there are things beyond the computation of the wiſeſt; I mean thoſe injuries which ſuch an impreſſion ſtifles in their birth, and the crimes which are thought of by miniſters, and unattempted.

We have obtained a treaty which ſecures our independence, as far as treaty can ſecure it; we have a tacit treaty, and but a tacit one, for the ſecurity of our commerce. A miniſter, who is no longer in power, has declared, that Ireland ought to have an equal trade with Great Britain. Have we any farther, or more laſting engagement? Our ports, indeed, cannot be ſhut up by foreign laws, but the ports of every other nation in Europe, may not be opened to receive us upon advantageous terms. The power of negociating with foreign countries, is placed in the miniſter of Great Britain, of an honeſt and a generous, but of a jealous and a monopolizing country; we hope, we truſt, that he will conſider himſelf as bound to take equal care of this country in all his negociations: But we know that half a line in a treaty can exclude Ireland from the commerce of half Europe, and this without any direct violation of any written engagement of Great Britain. No man has a higher opinion of her good faith, but I well foreſee that the over-

taxed

taxed manufacturers of England, may complain that the Iriſh can underſell them, unleſs they redeem by their treaties, what they may loſe by the cheapneſs of our labour. England may grow teſty when ſhe ſhall ſee ſome of her merchantry prefer an Iriſh to an Engliſh reſidence; and a tacit treaty may be oddly interpreted. In ſuch a caſe, a Britiſh miniſter will want the ſupport of the Volunteers of Ireland; and the balance of juſtice will hang the evener, if national ſtrength ſhall be in both the ſcales.

Look into hiſtory, and it will tell you, that few nations have been ſafe or free, after they ceaſed to be martial; but a leſs country connected with a greater one, never can. Should we admit that in every other ſituation, there would reſult more inconvenience than benefit from the power of reſiſtance,; yet Ireland ſhoud be an exception to the general rule. There is a native and unfading energy in an armed people, which defies calculation; we ſee the nations where the ſoldier and citizen are united, ſteadily and univerſally riſing in proſperity and importance. The gothic ſuppliants who ſettled in the plains of Thrace, by the permiſſion of Valens, and were ſo ſoon exaſperated by the outrages of his officers, did not exceed in number, one third of the inhabitants of Ireland; their ſpirit had been humbled by defeat; they were but ill inſtructed in the nicer evolutions of diſcipline, without money, without the hoarded preparations of a regular warfare, ignorant

norant of the art of attacking fortreſſes, liable to all the diviſions which ariſe from barbarous manners, and without that combining power which is the reſult of a regular government. They were oppoſed to the Roman empire, peopled by an hundred millions of inhabitants, to the diſcipline of the legions, and of legions who fought them with valour; to a power commanding a regular army of 400,000 men, the ſtores of thirty arſenals, the reſources of near one hundred provinces, and the excluſive knowledge of the art of war. Unfortunately for the Roman empire, the Goths were not confined to an iſland; they ravaged the moſt valuable poſſeſſions of men who had better weapons than themſelves; on the plains of Adrianople, they revived the memory of the ſlaughter of Cannæ, and after years of warfare, they made a treaty which inſured the ruin of their enemies. We ſee the ſame Romans, in almoſt the infancy of their greatneſs, oppoſed to no Gothic army, and no barbarian general. The inhabitants of a part of Italy, but the martial inhabitants, deſert their plows, and revenge the overthrow of Varro; they hold on their ſteady progreſs through victory and through defeat, nor do they ſtop in their courſe, until that fatal moment in which the citizen reſigns his defence into leſs faithful, and more practiſed hands. Wealth, and commerce, and diſcipline, and treaties, and conſtitutions may paſs away, but an armed people builds on a rock that will bear

bear the buffets of time; it is guardian of itſelf, and arbiter of its own deſtiny.

Volunteers of Ireland, will you preſerve this aſſurance of national proſperity, which fate or fortune has placed in your hands? Will you then endure a man who loves you, to tell you ſalutary truths; and will you deſpiſe thoſe men who would pamper you into indiſcretions? If you will, you muſt be above all things ſenſible, that it is the native force of the people, and not the reſtleſs exertion of that force that is to defend and to exalt your country. You muſt be ſo conſcious of the value of the conſtitution, as to think the preſervation of it a ſufficient reward for all your labours; you muſt eſteem it too good to be ſuperſeded, even by yourſelves. You muſt reflect, that the conduct which was endured in the time of war, and which was juſtifiable in the time of enormous grievances, is utterly unſuited to our preſent condition. The conſtitution is not ſuch a ſorry thing, as to need the perpetual interpoſition of a military guardian; there is nothing in it more admirable, nor more undeſcribable, than that ever reviving energy by which it purges off its own ailments. How often has the conſtitution aſſerted itſelf without ſuch an aid as yours? How often would a violent remedy have proved a fatal one? Do not fancy the nation undone, becauſe you do not ſee every thing going on

as you like: There was but one thing wanting, an armed reſource to which it might apply, not in caſes of ordinary grievance, but in caſes of the laſt neceſſity. Let me aſk, why have we departed from the ancient methods by which the ſenſe of the people uſed to be collected? For a very good reaſon; becauſe the matters on which we deliberated, referred to us in our military capacity. It was a queſtion between two nations, a queſtion to be decided perhaps by arms; we *reſolved* as armed men, becauſe we meant to imply, that we would *act* as armed men: A virtuous and an auguſt interpoſition, and one which ought not to be vulgariſed. The conſtitution had no remedial power which could reach the caſe; the whole of the conſtitution was invaded by a foreign power; that conſtitution which is the wonder of the world, but which would not be worth our care, if it were ſo wretched as to require our daily interpoſition. It poſſeſſes many obvious and many latent remedial powers, which come forth from their different ſtages of retirement, as the public exigences call upon them. The interpoſition of the people at large is not the moſt ordinary one; and in the mode of that interpoſition there are many degrees, inſtructions, petitions, remonſtrances, covenants. When the conſtitution finds all her own reſources too feeble, ſhe can call in an ally; the interpoſition of the people *in arms*. But to ſpeak a plain and an honeſt, though perhaps

not

not an agreeable truth, we ſee every day the order of things reverſed; the violent remedy is the firſt applied to. To ſpeak as armed men is become the common proceeding of a redreſſed people, living under a regular government. How often do we ſee publications in which the Volunteers are called upon, by men whoſe greateſt object is, to influence a conteſted election: Theſe Gentlemen would begin at Runnymede, that they may end in a County Court-houſe.

That the Volunteers, if they appear in ordinary political queſtions, muſt appear with leſs dignity and leſs effect, than what uſed to attend upon their reſolutions, is the inevitable conſequence of our own improved condition, and the leſs embarraſſed ſituation of Great Britain; that accuſtomed to dictate, they will be content with ſilence, that they will preſerve their military aſſociations, when ſo many of the motives for theſe aſſociations ſhall be withdrawn, may appear to be the expectation of a very ſanguine man. To the friends of their country, I hope I have ſtated motives enough; I fear, indeed, that there may be a few to whom the pleaſure of political dictation may be the only inducement to wear an uniform. There may be others, themſelves not factious, who, miſtaking habit and feeling for argument, may be unwilling to reſign a prerogative, which they are determined to exerciſe with moderation. Let them

reflect, that if they are pleaſed at their own reſolutions, they may lament the indiſcretions of others; and that a vaſt body may reſtrain itſelf by a general rule, but never can be reſtrained by general ſentiments. Every imprudence which may diſgrace a corps, and fill a news-paper, every compliment to the worthleſs, every inſult to the decent, every attempted controul of the freedom of parliament will be aſcribed to the Volunteers in general, and interpreted into a general attack upon the conſtitution: Some perhaps may be alienated from us by moderation; but more will be loſt by violence. Of all loſſes, let us guard againſt that which cannot be retrieved. There has been an attractive quality in volunteering, which has drawn in many a large contributor, who would perhaps have wiſhed that it had been leſs in faſhion. On great occaſions, theſe men have caught the general flame, on other occaſions, they have tempered violence, and have prevented jealouſy. They ought neither to have cauſe nor pretence for withdrawing themſelves; they have been themſelves improved, and the nation has been ſtrengthened by their acceſſion. From indolence, from diſguſt, from the fear of being un-coloneled, from the diſlike of being publicly cenſured, theſe leaders will gradually withdraw their names, and their contributions; the ſetting will moulder away, and many of the jewels will fall aſunder; he may not be a patriot, but he is an uſeful man, who is a bad

Volunteer

Volunteer himſelf, and keeps fifty good ones together.

I may be aſked, does the carrying of arms preclude the ſubject from the right of expreſſing his ſentiments on public queſtions? or, is there any thing illegal in the practice of diſcipline, that the Volunteers ſhould rather ſpeak in any other capacity, than that which has been the moſt efficacious? I ſhall not go into legal ſubtilties; the form of a petition may give rights to thoſe who preſent it, which perhaps they have not otherwiſe; the right of cenſuring the law of the land is, in ſome degree, incidental to that of petitioning for its repeal. There may be other privileges incidental to the being repreſented in parliament, beſides that of giving a vote; the carrying arms takes away no right, nor gives any; it is as legal to ſupport a firelock, as it was to practiſe archery, which our laws both permitted and enjoined. But I deny that the reſolutions of Volunteers are, upon ordinary queſtions, the moſt efficacious. The ſacred fire ſhould not be brought forth upon common occaſions, and if it be it will not be reverenced. It would be a new æra in our hiſtory, if the nation ſhould again ſpeak its diſcontents, by battalions; the fear that it ſhould do ſo, would have an effect on the meaſures of government, which can never be hoped for from the preſent practice, from reſolutions produced by

by no general confederacy, poſſibly by no real grievance, ſeldom preceded by thought, and never followed by terror.

If *the nation* ſpeaks, be it in what manner it may, it will be known that it is an armed nation which ſpeaks. The voice of Achilles diſmayed the Trojans when he appeared without his armour. It will be known too that we have another mode of interpoſition in reſerve, and the circumſpection of our conduct will be a proof of the cool determination of our minds. Men, who have no other road to even an imaginary importance, will reſent this counſel; they will propoſe to your ſcattered meetings what they call ſpirited reſolutions, as if there were any true ſpirit in what incurs no danger, and is no proof of diſintereſtedneſs. They will not apply to a county meeting, where their politics would be overborne, and their arguments canvaſſed, but to the ſergeant's guard of which they are called colonels. Countenanced by the indiſcretions of better men, they will think themſelves entitled to decide on the niceſt, and to influence the greateſt queſtions. One corps will addreſs his Majeſty to change his miniſters; another will diſapprove of their ſucceſſors; one will congratulate upon a peace; another will cenſure it; a third will withhold its ſanction till the articles are laid properly before it; a fourth may recommend war; another may give its confirmation to an act of parliament with an indulgent precipitation; another

may

may withhold it with a conſiderate dignity. The ſuperintendents of the executive and legiſlative branches of the conſtitution will hardly neglect the judicial. The judgment of courts, the characters of men, the ceſſion of territories, the ſeizures of whiſky, the abolition of boroughs, the ſealing of linens, the appointment of miniſters, the importation of cloth, the merits of Parliaments, and the validity of ſtatutes, will be tried in a ſummary manner, by a number of ſeparate tribunals, whoſe authority would be utterly intolerable, if it were not certain to become infinitely ridiculous. The opinions of men will fall from us; the wiſe will be diſguſted, and the whole body will be defamed. The faſhion, the character of the Volunteers will be frittered away; the inſtitution will decline and periſh; the child of wiſdom and of virtue will die of the fidgets. The ariſtocratical ſpirit will riſe again, it will conquer, and it will not make a moderate uſe of its victory. The nation will fall again into the hands of corrupt men, who will ſell its intereſts, and of an ariſtocracy that will fool them away; and the welfare of Ireland and her Volunteers will decline together.

Volunteers of Ireland, will you ſtop this inundation of nonſenſe, which will undermine your foundations? You muſt reflect then, that as in civil ſociety, men are forced to give up a part of their natural liberty, ſo in your aſſociations you muſt ſubmit to the controul of rules

of

of your own making. You have no authority over each other, except the weight of a combined opinion. You ſhould uſe that authority; you ſhould form a ſyſtem; you ſhould enact rules by which every corps ſhould be bound, with whom the general body ſhall deign to aſſociate. You have not a little power over each other. You have the power of making a corps infamous; that is, of deſtroying it. Permit me to recommend to you, to have in Dublin a general meeting of delegates, not for the purpoſe of political dictation, but confined in its purpoſe to one great object—the eſtabliſhing a ſyſtematical conduct. It will be the moſt important queſtion, ſave one, on which you ever deliberated. The pens and tongues of men will be employed upon it; the ſubject will be amply diſcuſſed, and ſolemnly decided upon. Perhaps too it would be judicious to appoint a commander in chief. A meaſure which would not facilitate any deſign againſt government; but which would enable you with more dignity and union to ſhew it ſeveral marks of attention. Your appearance in company with the army, your public tokens of reſpect to the executive power, improve your diſcipline; they increaſe reſpect, and they weaken jealouſy. By ſuch an aſſembly as I have preſumed to recommend, much would be hazarded, if the deputies ſhould not be confined by their inſtructions to a ſingle point —the forming rules for the Government of the Volunteers themſelves. The joined hands of the armed aſſociations ought not to be expoſed

to

to the electrical ſtroke of any ſudden propoſition. A vaſt body cannot be long, nor well governed, unleſs their minds be concentered to ſome important object, or unleſs they ſubmit to ſtrong regulations. The cenſorial power of the delegates of the whole, will have a ſtrong, I hope, a deciſive influence. Men who may break the laws with eaſe, and who may ſupport each other in the violation, ſhould feel a new controul, as well as a new facility, of offending from the nature of our aſſociation. The men who commit a riot in uniform, or who countenance and protect a criminal, ſhould feel the whole weight of general cenſure. They are the moſt fatal enemies to our cauſe: Offenders, but of the ſecond magnitude, againſt the laws of the land. They are traitors to the armed majeſty of the people.

If the gentry of England, ſtood in the files of her militia; if they choſe and could diſplace their own officers; if they were ſubject to no ignominious puniſhments; if there were no ſubſtitutes, ſhould we not ſay, the Britiſh conſtitution is ſafe? Though ſuch a militia owed more than a voluntary obedience to the crown, and though they would be bound to an abſolute ſilence upon all the ordinary meaſures of government, we have an inſtitution more friendly to liberty than ſuch a militia; a body who form all their own regulations, and who have a faculty of encreaſing upon every alarm of the conſtitution. If neither ancient wiſdom,

nor modern refinement can ſhew us any thing more favourable to freedom, and not incompatible with government, let us preſerve an inſtitution which we think to be the beſt in the world. If it be worth our trouble, let it be worth our thought. The time is extremely critical; and the whole current of Iriſh politics will take its direction from the reſolves of the enſuing ſummer.

FINIS.

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